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# ASIAN AMERICANS IN WASHINGTON STATE: CLOSING THEIR *HIDDEN* ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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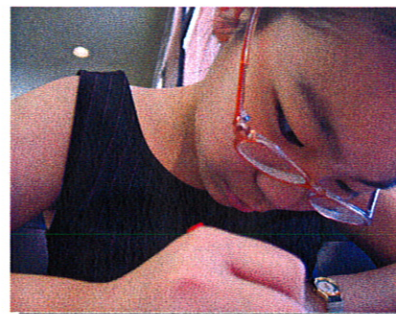
## BACKGROUND OF REPORT

In 2008, the Washington State Legislature (HB-2687 Sec. 119, 1&2) funded two separate studies of Asian American and Pacific Islander American students in the State's public schools. This report on Asian American students fulfills the requirement of an agreement with the State of Washington Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (CAPAA) to conduct a study on the achievement gap of Asian American students, with attention to demographic and educational trends, their ethnic groups and school, family, and community systems. There is a separate report on Pacific Islander students. Studies on African American, American Indian/Alaska Native and Latino students were also undertaken in this period as part of a larger effort of the State to close Washington's achievement gap.

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## FRAMEWORK AND PROCESS OF STUDY

The study begins with the premise that the academic challenges of Asian American students are *hidden* by: (1) the “model minority” stereotype that assumes all Asian Americans are academically successful; (2) the practice of lumping disparate Asian American groups into a single category; and (3) a predominant reliance on mainstream sources to explain Asian



American educational experiences. To uncover Asian American achievement gaps, the study features disaggregated data to identify differences across and within Asian American ethnic groups in education and other variables. It also incorporates the findings of community-based research that provide Asian American voices and insights of their situation in schools and U.S. society.

The researchers reviewed State education reports and incorporated quantitative data from the U.S. Census, Office of the Superintendent and Public Instruction (OSPI), Seattle School District, and other sources. The study makes use of qualitative studies on Asian American student experiences and reports of community-based organizations. We also conducted a survey of Asian/Asian American teachers, consulted with youth and social service agencies, and met monthly with an advisory committee of community representatives. The study began on August 1, 2008 and was submitted to CAPAA at the end of December 2008.

## OVERVIEW: WHO ARE ASIAN AMERICANS?

Asian Americans are persons with ancestry from Asian countries and islands in the Pacific Rim who live in the United States. They are an integral part of Washington’s past, present, and future. They helped develop the Pacific Northwest in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (railroads, mining, agriculture and fisheries) and today can be found in all economic sectors, including Washington’s aerospace, biotech, and high-tech industries and its small businesses, as well as the State’s political and cultural arenas.



(Source: Wing Luke Asian Museum)



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In 2007, Asian Americans comprised 6.6% of the State's population. They are 8% when Asians alone and those who are mixed race are combined. They are diverse in ethnicity, (24 groups are counted in the U.S. census), languages, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Chinese, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Koreans, and Asian Indians are the five largest groups in the State. Washington has the 7<sup>th</sup> largest number of Asian Americans (429,406) among states.

Currently, 67% of Asian Americans in the State are foreign-born, an outcome of the 1965 Immigration Act and the post 1975 Refugee Acts following the wars in Southeast Asia. And 40% of Asian Americans in the State are limited in English proficiency, which can be a barrier to schooling and employment.

Washington's Asian American ethnic groups have varying family and community resources and networks by which they can support their children's education. For example, the average Asian American per capita income was \$20,141 in 2000, but it ranged from \$28,307 for Japanese to \$6,445 for Hmong. While 36.8% of Asian Americans hold a bachelor's degree or higher, only 6.6% of Cambodians do so, compared to 67% and 58% of Taiwanese and Asian Indians, respectively. Southeast Asian groups are especially disadvantaged in income, poverty rates, education, and English language proficiency (e.g., 65.6% of Vietnamese speak "English less than 'very well'").

## **FINDINGS: HIDDEN AND EVIDENT ACHIEVEMENT GAPS**

### **Washington State Public Schools**

Asian Americans are 8% of the State's students and are concentrated in school districts along the I-5 corridor. In 2007, there were 16 school districts with Asian Americans comprising more than 10% of their student body, most notably, Bellevue (26%), Renton (25%), Seattle (22%) and Highline (21%).

They speak more than 100 languages and dialects with 40% speaking a language other than English as their primary language. The five largest language groups are Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese-Cantonese, Tagalog, and Khmer (Cambodian). Forty percent of Vietnamese-speaking students are enrolled in Seattle (24%), Renton (8%), and Highline (8%) School Districts, whereas nearly 40% of Korean-speaking students are in Federal Way (19%), Bellevue (14%), and Mukilteo (7%).

More than 30% of Asian Americans receive Free/Reduced Price Lunch and 14% are enrolled in Transitional Bilingual Instruction Program (TBIP). In aggregate the Asian American WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning) performance is strong compared with other racial/ethnic groups, but uneven by subject area, grade level, and student subgroup. Many are not performing well in math, contrary to their stereotype. ELL students are especially at risk. Girls are outperforming boys in every subject across grades.

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## Seattle Public Schools

Seattle schools have the largest number (10,311 or 12%) of Asian American students in the State. Chinese, Vietnamese, and Filipinos are the major groups. There are ethnic group differences. Of Southeast Asians, 46% are not living with both parents, compared with 16% for Chinese. The highest high school dropout rates are among Other Southeast Asians (14%), Other Asians (14%), and Filipinos (9%). School dropout data are likely underestimated, and also include students who report being pushed out or kicked out by authorities. Japanese Americans are doing well in all WASL subjects. Filipino Americans are struggling academically.

## Disengaged English Language Learner Students

Asian American ELL students are underserved, undersupported, and experience academic difficulties. Only one third of Asian Non-Native English speakers are in ELL programs and few of them have been provided with language assistance programs/services in their native language. While the linguistic diversity of Asian American ELL students has long been *the* excuse for not attending to their needs, school districts along the I-5 corridor *can* identify their major two to three language groups, but few of them have developed any program for these majority Asian language groups. Teacher quality, teacher-ELL student ratio, and years of support are inadequate. Teacher-centered pedagogy and mainstream-centered ELL curriculum alienate ELL students. Programs that result in English monolingualism (but not necessarily English proficiency) instead of bilingualism, negatively affect students' communications and relations with their families and communities. Little opportunity has been given to develop learning communities that value and incorporate families and their cultures to assist ELL students.

## An Unsupportive School Climate: Asian American Students at Risk

Asian American students experience alienation and marginalization in schools to varying degrees, but WASL data reveal that **Filipino American** and **Southeast Asian American** students are most at risk. Qualitative studies find that teachers favor East Asian students over them. They are seen as low achievers and gang members. They feel no one cares when they are not in the curriculum, and they face bullying and racial violence. Peer group pressure and mental health problems are issues. Asian American teachers play a vital role in supporting students of color. University of Washington-Beyond High School data find ethnic group differences in parental school participation and college attendance. More Southeast Asians and Filipinos are in community colleges than 4-year institutions. Korean and Chinese Americans are more typically in 4-year universities.



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## **School, Family and Community Relations**

Asian American parents emphasize education as a hedge against discrimination in a racial climate. The pressures they place on children to succeed can contribute to student distress. Ethnic-based out-of-school time (OST) programs supplement public schooling, supporting both high achievers and struggling students. Community-based youth and social service agencies intervene to support students in academic need, as well as dropouts and gang members, help bridge cultural and generational differences within families, and assist in school-student relations. Models of school-community organization partnerships that increase parental engagement in schools can help close achievement gaps.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Adopt a Data Collection, Research, and Evaluation Plan.**

To assess the reduction of achievement gaps over time, collect accurate data on students' backgrounds and academic outcomes. Disaggregated data by Asian American ethnic groups and in student subgroups is essential. Alone, aggregate data is incomplete. Develop common forms for all school districts to OSPI. Establish links between CSRS and other data sets to facilitate comparative and longitudinal assessment. Consult with Asian American groups in data development and research questions. Follow up with student dropouts and graduates.

### **2. Create a Seamless Pipeline Pre-K through 16.**

Ensure that all Asian American ethnic groups, especially those at-risk, are included in academic and co-curricular programs from early education (pre-K) through K–16. To enhance outreach and partnerships, collaborate with community groups and higher education institutions.

### **3. Broaden and Enhance Measurements and Accountability.**

Use a range of measurements to evaluate student performance. Balance cognitive-based tests ("high-stakes" testing with other forms; qualitative with quantitative data likewise). Educate students and families about measurements, standards, and requirements. Review assessment methods and materials for cultural biases. Engage all stakeholders to ensure positive not punitive measurements.

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#### **4. Foster Culturally Responsive Approaches and Practices.**

A supportive school climate for Asian Americans is positive, individualized, free of stereotypes, and views them as assets. Eliminate institutional barriers that disengage students, such as discrimination, bullying, and expectations based on the model minority stereotype. Incorporate culturally responsive teaching and curricula. Train all school personnel to work more effectively with Asian Americans. Recruit, retain, and advance effective Asian American teachers and administrators.

#### **5. Adopt Effective ELL Programs.**

Adopt effective ELL programs and support them for the time necessary for students to achieve *academic* English proficiency. Ensure all Asian American ELL students are well served. Employ highly effective and well-trained bilingual/ESL teachers, aides, and counselors.

#### **6. Address Teacher Quality and Effectiveness.**

Recruit, support, and reward teachers who demonstrate effectiveness in closing Asian American achievement gaps. We recommend teachers develop positive relations with families and communities; view students as individuals not stereotypes; know their students by gaining knowledge of Asian American ethnic groups; use multiple teaching styles; and provide challenging and engaging curricula that incorporates Asian American histories and cultures.

#### **7. Engage Asian American Families in Schools.**

Many foreign-born parents are unfamiliar with U.S. practices, such as what teachers and schools expect of them and what they can expect of teachers and schools. Engage Asian American parents in ways that are meaningful to them. To be more welcoming, school leaders are encouraged to know their communities, recognize Asian American families and cultures as resources, and help them navigate the U.S. school system. Hold information meetings on community sites. Eliminate language barriers in print materials and with translators.

#### **8. Strengthen School-Community Partnerships.**

Asian American community groups have wide-ranging networks and experts. Community-based organizations (CBOs) have skills and experience working with Asian American families, youth, and their issues. Schools are encouraged to collaborate with community groups and organizations to meet the needs of Asian American students and better serve their families. Partnerships and resource sharing can enhance the work of both schools and communities in closing student achievement gaps, especially in a difficult budget period.